Marxism

AND THE MANIPULATION OF MAN



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Ludwig von Mises gave nine lectures, June 23–July 3, 1952, at the San Francisco Public Library on the fundamental errors and misconceptions of Marx's dialectical materialism and theory of class warfare. These lectures were gathered together in *Marxism Unmasked* and published in 2006 by the Foundation for Economic Education. "Marxism and the Manipulation of Man" is lecture 5.

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Marxism and the Manipulation of Man

by Ludwig von Mises

It is an astonishing fact that a philosophy like Marxism, which attacks the whole social system, remained for many decades more or less unattacked and uncontested. Karl Marx was not very well known in his lifetime and his writings remained practically unknown to the greater part of his contemporaries. The great socialists of his age were other men—for instance, Ferdinand Lassalle. Lassalle's agitations lasted only a year because he was killed in duel as a result of a private affair, but he was considered a great man in his age. Marx, on the other hand, was more or less unknown. People neither approved, nor criticized, his teachings. He died in 1883. After his death, there appeared the first part of Böhm-Bawerk's critique of the economic doctrines of Karl Marx. And later in the 1890s, when the last volume of *Das Kapital* was published, there appeared the second part of this critique, which completely killed Marx's economic doctrines. The most orthodox Marxians tried to

revive and restate his doctrines. But there was practically no sensible critique of the philosophical doctrines of Karl Marx.

Marx's philosophical doctrines became popular in that people became familiar with some of his terms, slogans, and so forth, although they used them differently from the way they were used in the system of Karl Marx. Such simplification happens to many doctrines. For instance, Darwinism became known as the theory based on the idea that man is the grandson of an ape. What remains of Nietzsche is not much more than his term "superman," which later acquired popularity in the United States without any connection to Nietzsche. Regarding Marx, people know his terms but they use them very loosely. But by and large, Marxian ideas have little or no opposition.

One of the reasons why the doctrine of Marx was so diluted in the public mind was the way Engels tried to explain Marxian theory. See his statement at the graveside of Marx: "Marx discovered the law of mankind's historical evolution, i.e., the simple fact, hitherto hidden beneath ideological overgrowths, that men must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing before they can pursue politics, science, art, religion, and the like." Yet no one ever denied this. But now if someone says something against Marxian doctrine then they can be asked: "How can you be so stupid as to deny that one must first eat before one becomes a philosopher?"

Again there is the theory of the material productive forces. But no explanation is offered for their formation. Dialectical materialism states that the material productive forces come to the world—one doesn't know how they come, nor where they come from—and it is these material productive forces that create everything else, i.e., the superstructure.

People sometimes believe that there has been a very sharp conflict between the various churches and Marxism. They consider Marxism and socialism as incompatible with the teachings of all Christian churches and sects. The early communist sects and early monastic communities were based on a peculiar interpretation of the Bible in general, and of the book of Acts especially. We don't know much about these early communist sects but they existed in the Middle Ages and also in the early years of the Reformation. All these sects were in conflict with the established doctrines of their churches or denominations. So it would be absolutely wrong to make the Christian church responsible for them. I mention this to show that, at least in the minds of some groups, most of which the church considered heretical, there is no absolute conflict between socialism and the teachings of the church. The anti-Christian tendencies of the socialist forerunners of Karl Marx, of Karl Marx himself; and later of his followers, the Marxians, must first of all be understood within the whole framework which later gave rise to modern socialism.

The states, the governments, the conservative parties, were not always opposed to socialism. On the contrary; the personnel of a government has a tendency or a bias in favor of the expansion of government power; one could even say that there is an "occupational disease" on the part of government personnel to be in favor of more and more governmental activities. It was precisely this fact, this propensity of governments to adopt socialism—and many governments really did adopt socialism—that brought Marxism into conflict with the various governments.

I have pointed out that the worst thing that can happen to a socialist is to have his country ruled by socialists who are not his friends. This was the case with respect to Karl Marx and the Prussian government. The Prussian government was not against socialism. Ferdinand Lassalle attacked the liberal parties of Prussia, which were at that time fighting a great constitutional battle against the Hohenzollern kings, headed by Bismarck. The majority in Prussia at that time was against the government; the government couldn't get a majority in the Prussian Parliament. The Prussian government was not very strong at that time. The King and the Prime Minister ruled the country without consent, without the cooperation of the Parliament. This was the case in the early 1860s. As an illustration of the weakness of the Prussian government, Bismarck, in his *Memoirs*, reported a conversation he had with the King. Bismarck said he would defeat the Parliament and the liberals. The King answered, "Yes, I know how

that will end. Here in the square in front of the palace. First they will execute you and then they will execute me."

Queen Victoria [1819–1901], whose oldest daughter [Victoria, 1840–1901] had married the royal prince of Prussia, was not very pleased by these developments; she was convinced that the Hohenzollerns would be defeated. At this critical moment Ferdinand Lassalle, who was at the head of a labor movement which was then still very modest, very small, came to the aid of the Hohenzollern government. Lassalle had meetings with Bismarck and they "planned" socialism. They introduced state aid, production cooperatives, nationalization, and general manhood suffrage. Later Bismarck really embarked on a program of social legislation. The greatest rival of the Marxians was the Prussian government, and they fought with every possible movement.

Now you must realize that in Prussia, the Prussian Church, the Protestant Church, was simply a department of the government, administered by a member of the Cabinet—the Minister of Education and Affairs of Culture. One of the councilors in the lower levels of the administration dealt with the problems of the church. The church in this regard was a state church; it was even a state church in its origin. Until 1817, there were Lutherans and Calvinists in Prussia. The Hohenzollerns didn't like this state of affairs. The Lutherans were in the majority in the old Prussian territories, but

in the newly acquired territories there were both groups. In spite of the fact that the majority of the whole Prussian people were Lutherans, the electorate of the Brandenburgs had changed from Lutherans to Calvinists. The Hohenzollerns were Calvinists, but they were the head of the Lutheran Church in their country. Then in 1817, under Frederick Wilhelm III of Prussia, the two churches were merged to form the Prussian Union Church. The Church was a branch of the country's government.

From the seventeenth century on in Russia, the church was simply a department of the government. The church was not independent. Dependence of the church on the secular power was one of the characteristics of the Eastern Church at Constantinople. The head of the Eastern Empire was in fact the Superior of the Patriarch. This same system was to some extent carried over into Russia, but there the church was only a part of the government. Therefore, if you attacked the church, you also attacked the government.

The third country in which the problem was very critical was Italy, where the nationalist unification implied the abolition of the secular rule of the Pope. Until the second part of the nineteenth century the central part of Italy was ruled independently by the Pope. In 1860, the King of Sardinia conquered these states. The Pope retained only Rome, under the protection of a detachment of the French Army until 1860, when the French had to withdraw to fight

Prussia. Therefore, there was a very violent feud between the Catholic Church and the Italian secular state. The struggle of the church against the ideas of the Marxians concerning religion is something different from their struggle against the socialist program. Today it is complicated even more by the fact that the Russian Church, the Oriental Orthodox Church, came as it seems, to some agreement with the Bolsheviks. The struggle in the East is to a great extent a struggle between the Eastern Church and the Western Church—a continuation of the struggle that originated more than a thousand years ago between the two churches. Therefore, the conflicts in these countries, between Russia and the western boundaries of the Iron Curtain, are very complicated. It is not only a struggle against totalitarian economic methods for economic freedom; it is also a struggle of various nationalities, of different linguistic groups. Consider, for instance, the attempts of the present Russian government to make the various Baltic nationalities over into Russians—a continuation of something that had been started by the Tsars—and the struggle in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and so on, against the attempts of the Russian Church to bring them back, as they say, to the Oriental Creed. To understand all these struggles one needs a special familiarity with these nationalities and with the religious histories of these parts of the world.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were changes that expanded the size of the territory in which the Pope's

supremacy was acknowledged. Therefore, there existed a Russian Church, the Orthodox Church, and a Ukrainian or Russian Catholic Church which acknowledged the supremacy of the Pope. All these things together constituted the great religious struggles of the East. However, one must not confuse the events happening in these nationalistic and religious struggles with the fight against communism. For instance, the politicians fighting against the Russians today are not always, or at least not in most cases, fighters in favor of a free economic system. They are Marxians, socialists. They would probably like to have a totalitarian police state, but they don't want it to be governed by the Russians.

From this point of view, one cannot say that there is any real opposition to the social teachings and social programs of Marxism. On the other hand, it is important to realize that there isn't necessarily always a connection between anti-Marxism, an ideological philosophy, and economic freedom.

One of the outstanding contemporaries of Karl Marx in Germany was a philosopher, Friedrich Albert Lange [1828–1875]. He wrote a famous book, *The History of Marxism*, considered for many years, not only in Germany but also in English-speaking countries, one of the best introductions to philosophy. Lange was a socialist; he wrote another book about socialism. In his book he didn't criticize Marx, but rather materialism. Marxian materialism is a very imperfect

materialism because it traces all changes back only to something which is itself already the product of the human mind.

It is important to stress the fact that the critiques of Marxism were sometimes very wrong. I want to point to only one typical example. This is the popular propensity of anti-Marxians to consider dialectical materialism and Marxism as something belonging to the same group of ideas as Freudian psychoanalysis. I am not a psychologist, but I only have to point out how mixed up these people are who believe that materialism in general and Marxian materialism in particular have some connection with Freudian psychoanalysis.

Before Sigmund Freud [1856–1939] and Josef Breuer [1842–1925], who opened up this whole method of thinking, began to develop their doctrines, it was the generally uncontested assumption among all doctors that mental disabilities were caused by pathological changes in the human body. If a man had something that was called a nervous or mental disease they looked for some bodily factor that brought about this state of affairs. From the point of view of the doctor who deals with the human body this is the only possible interpretation. However, sometimes they were absolutely correct when they said, "We don't know the cause." Their only method was to look for a physical cause. One could give many examples. I want to cite only one. It happened in 1889, just a few years before the first book of Freud and Breuer was published. An eminent man in France committed

suicide. For political reasons and because of his religion, the question was raised whether or not he was sane. His family wanted to prove that it was a mental disease. In order to prove his mental disease to the Church, they had to discover some physical cause. There was an autopsy by eminent doctors, and their report was published. "We discover certain things in the brain," they said; "there is something that is not regular." At that time, people thought that if a man doesn't behave like other people, has no physical sign of abnormality in his body, he is a malingerer. Sometimes this is unfortunate, because one can only discover whether or not a person is a malingerer after he is dead. In this regard, psychoanalysis brought about a great change. The case of Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria [1858–1889], who committed suicide at Mayerling, raised similar issues.

The famous first case was that of a woman who was paralyzed. Yet nothing could be discovered in her body to explain her situation. The case was written up by a man who followed the advice of a Latin poet: wait nine years with your manuscript before you publish. Breuer got the idea that the origin of this bodily deficiency was not physical but that it was in the mind. This was a radical change in the field of the natural sciences; such a thing had never happened before—a discovery that mental factors, ideas, superstitions, fables, wrong ideas, what a man thinks, what he believes, can bring about changes in the body. This was something that all the natural sciences had denied and contested before.

Freud was a very conscientious and cautious man. He didn't say, "I have completely discredited the old doctrines." He said,

> Perhaps one day, after a very long time, the pathological doctors will discover that ideas are already the product of some physical external bodily factor. Then psychoanalysis will no longer be needed or useful. But for the time being you must at least admit that there is a temporary value in Breuer's and my discovery and that, from the point of view of present-day science, there is nothing that confirms the materialist thesis that every idea or every thought is the product of some external factor, just as urine is a product of the body. Psychoanalysis is the opposite of materialism; it is the only contribution to the problem of materialism vs. idealism that has come from empirical research in the human body.

We have to deal with the ways some people abuse psychoanalysis. I do not defend those psychoanalysts who try to explain everything from the point of view of certain urges, among which the sex urge is considered the most important. There was a book by a Frenchman dealing with Baudelaire [Charles Baudelaire, 1821–1867]. Baudelaire liked to spend money, but he didn't earn money because publishers didn't buy his poems during his lifetime. But his mother had money; she had married money and her husband died and left it to

> her. Baudelaire wrote his mother a lot of letters. This writer found all sorts of subconscious explanations for his letters. I don't defend this attempt. But his letter writing doesn't need any further explanation than that Baudelaire wanted money.

Freud said he didn't know anything about socialism. In this regard he was very different from Einstein [1879–1955] who said, "I don't know anything about economics, but socialism is very good."

If we follow how Marxism became the leading philosophy of our age, we must mention Positivism and the school of Auguste Comte. Comte was a socialist similar to Karl Marx. In his youth, Auguste Comte had been the secretary of Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon was a totalitarian who wanted to rule the whole world by world council and, of course, he believed he would be the president of this world council. According to Comte's idea of world history, it was necessary to search for the truth in the past. "But now, I, August Comte, have discovered the truth. Therefore, there is no longer any need for freedom of thought or freedom of the press. I want to rule and to organize the whole country."

It is very interesting to follow the origin of certain terms which are today so familiar that we assume they must have been in the language from time immemorial. In French, the words "organize" and "organizer" were unknown before the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth century. With regard to

this term, "organize," Balzac [1799–1850] observed "This is a new-fangled Napoleonic term. This means you alone are the dictator and you deal with the individual as the builder works with stones."

Another new term, "social engineering," deals with the social structure. The social engineer deals with the social structure or with his fellowmen as the master builder deals with his bricks. Reasoning in this way, the Bolsheviks eliminate those individuals who are useless. In the term "social engineering" you have the idea of planning, the idea of socialism. Today we have many names for socialism. If a thing is popular, then the language has many expressions for it. These planners say in defense of their ideas, you must plan things; you cannot let things act "automatically."

Sometimes "automatically" is used in a metaphorical sense to apply to things that happen on the market. If the supply of a product drops, then they say prices go up "automatically." But this doesn't mean that this is done without human consciousness, without some persons bidding and offering. Prices go up precisely because people are anxious to acquire these things. Nothing in the economic system happens "automatically." Everything happens because certain people behave in a definite way.

Also the planners say, "How can you be so stupid as to advocate the absence of planning?" But no one advocates the absence of a

plan. The question is not "Plan, or no plan." The question is "Whose plan? The plan of one dictator only? Or the plan of many individuals?" Everyone plans. He plans to go to work; he plans to go home; he plans to read a book; he plans a thousand other things. A "great" plan eliminates the plans of everybody else; then only one plan can be supreme. If the "great" plan and the plans of individuals come into conflict, whose plan is to be supreme? Who decides? The police decide! And they decide in favor of the "great" plan.

In the early days of socialism, some critics of socialism used to blame socialists for their ignorance of human nature. A man who must execute the plan of somebody else only would no longer be a man of the kind we call human. This objection was answered by those socialists who said, "If human nature is against socialism, then human nature will have to be changed." Karl Kautsky said this many years before, but he didn't give any details.

The details were provided by Behaviorism and by [Ivan] Pavlov [1849–1936], the psychologist mentioned in every book by a Marxist. The explanation was offered by Pavlov's conditioned reflex. Pavlov was a Tsarist; he made his experiments in the days of the Tsar. Instead of human rights, Pavlov's dog had canine rights. This is the future of education.

The Behaviorist philosophy wants to deal with human individuals as if there were no ideas or no faults in men. Behaviorism consid-

ers every human action as a reaction to a stimulus. Everything in the physical and physiological nature responds to certain reflexes. They say, "Man belongs to the same realm as animals. Why should he be different? There are certain reflexes and certain instincts that guide men to certain ends. Certain stimuli bring about certain reactions." What the Behaviorists and the Marxists did not see was that you cannot even discredit such a theory of stimuli without entering into the meaning that the individual attaches to such stimuli. The housewife, when quoted the price of an object which she is considering buying, reacts differently to $5 than she does to $6. You cannot determine the stimulus without entering into the meaning. And the meaning itself is an idea.

The Behaviorists' approach says, "We will condition the other people." But who are the "we"? And who are the "other people"? "Today," they say, "people are conditioned for capitalism by many things, by history, by good people, by bad people, by the church, etc., etc."

This philosophy doesn't give us any answer other than the answer we have already seen. The whole idea of this philosophy is that we must accept what Karl Marx told us because he had the great gift—he was entrusted by Providence, by the material productive forces, with discovering the law of historical evolution. He knows the end toward which history leads mankind. This leads eventually to the point where we must accept the idea that the party, the group, the clique, that

has defeated the others by force of arms, is the right ruler, that he is called by the material productive forces to "condition" all other people. The fantastic thing is that the school which develops this philosophy calls itself "liberal" and calls its system a "people's democracy," "real democracy," and so on. It is also fantastic that the vice president of the United States [Henry Wallace, 1888–1965] one day declared, "We in the United States have only a civil rights democracy—but in Russia there is economic democracy."

There was a socialist author, valued highly by the Bolsheviks in the beginning, who said the most powerful man in the world is the man in whose favor the greatest lies are told and believed. (Something similar was said by Adolf Hitler.) Here is the power of this philosophy. The Russians have the power to say, "We are a democracy and our people are happy and enjoy a full life under our system." And other nations seem to be unable to find the right answer to this idea. If they had found the right answer, this philosophy wouldn't be so popular.

There are people living here in the United States, at an American standard of living, who think they are unhappy because they do not live in Soviet Russia where, they say, there is a classless society and everything is better than it is here. But it seems that it is not very much fun to live in Russia, not only from the material point of view, but from the point of view of individual freedom. If you ask, "How is it possible that people say everything is wonderful in a country,

Russia, in which everything is probably not very wonderful," then we must answer, "Because our last three generations were unable to explode the contradictions and the failures of this philosophy of dialectic materialism."

The greatest philosophy in the world today is that of dialectical materialism—the idea that it is inevitable that we are being carried toward socialism. The books that have been written up to now have not succeeded in countering this thesis. You must write new books. You must think of these problems. It is ideas that distinguish men from animals. This is the human quality of man. But according to the ideas of the socialists the opportunity to have ideas should be reserved to the Politburo only; all the other people should only carry out what the Politburo tells them to do.

It is impossible to defeat a philosophy if you do not fight in the philosophical field. One of the great deficiencies of American thinking—and America is the most important country in the world because it is here, not in Moscow, that this problem will be decided—the greatest shortcoming, is that people think all these philosophies and everything that is written in books is of minor importance, that it doesn't count. Therefore they underrate the importance and the power of ideas. Yet there is nothing more important in the world than ideas. Ideas and nothing else will determine the outcome of this great struggle. It is a great

mistake to believe that the outcome of the battle will be determined by things other than ideas.

Russian Marxists, like all other Marxists, had the idea that they wanted to nationalize agriculture. That is, the theorists wanted to—the individual worker did not want to nationalize the farms; they wanted to take the big farms, break them up, and distribute the land among the small farmers. This has been called "agrarian reform." The social revolutionaries wanted to distribute the farms to the poor peasants. In 1917, Lenin coined a new slogan, "You make revolution with the slogan of the day." Therefore, they accepted something that was against Marxism. Later they started the nationalization of farm lands. Then they adopted this idea in the new countries they took over; they told every man that he would get his own farm.

They started this program in China. In China they took the big farms and abolished the rights of mortgage banks and landlords and freed the tenants from making any payments to the landlords. Therefore, it was not philosophy that made the Chinese peasants communistic, but the promise of a better life; people thought they would improve their conditions if they could get some farm land owned up to then by wealthier people. But this is not the solution for the Chinese problem. The advocates of this program were called agricultural reformers; they were not Marxians. The idea of land distribution is entirely un-Marxian.

Additional comments by Mises during the question-and-answer period.

Majorities are also not godlike. “The people’s voice is God’s” is an old German maxim, but it is not true. The basis of the idea of talking about pleasing the majority is that in the long run the majority will not tolerate rule by a minority; if the majority are not pleased there will be a violent revolution to change the government. The system of representative government is not radical; it is precisely a way to make a change of government possible without violence; many think that, with the approval of the people, they can change the government at the next election. Majority rule is not a good system but it is a system that assures peaceful conditions within the country. Newspapers, periodicals, books, and so on, are the opinion-makers.

The great progress of the modern age is that it led to representative government. The great pioneer of this idea was the British philosopher David Hume

[1711–1776], who pointed out that in the long run government is not, as people believed, based on military power, but on opinion, on the opinion of the majority. What is needed is to convince the majority. It is not because the majority is always right. On the contrary, I would say the majority is very often wrong. But if you do not want to resort to a violent overthrow of the government, and this is impossible if you are the minority because if you are the minority they will overthrow you, you have only one method—to talk to the people, to write, and to talk again.

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